



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE  
*Milwaukee County*  
CHRIS ABELE • COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**For Immediate Release:**

DATE: October 31, 2016

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## **Broad Community Support for County Executive Abele's Transit Plan**

Independent Fiscal Experts Sounding the Alarm that Milwaukee County's Transit System is in Trouble

MILWAUKEE – Over the past several months, support for the County Executive's plan to save Milwaukee County's transit system has grown dramatically from a wide range of constituencies. Community members and organizations have written letters outlining the reasons for their support of County Executive Chris' Abele's SAVE (Sustainable, Affordable, Visionary, and Efficient) Transit plan and, in particular, the creation of a dedicated funding source, the vehicle registration fee. These voices represent independent and not often aligned interests – from traditional transit activists to the business community and advocates for seniors and people with disabilities. This unprecedented spectrum of support shows the critical importance a robust transportation system.

Independent fiscal experts, like the Milwaukee County Comptroller and the Public Policy Forum, are sounding the alarm in expressing urgency that a new revenue source is needed in order to prevent crumbling roads and bus service cuts. While the County Executive's fiscally responsible approach has helped to sustain the transit system to date, State aid to Milwaukee County continues to decline, making the system unsustainable into the future. Our community depends on roads and buses to get to work so it is not responsible to do nothing or wait for the State to do its fair share. Independent fiscal experts are saying the right thing to do is to implement the County Executive's plan that will allow the County to bring in more revenue through a vehicle registration fee to fix its problems once and for all.

This plan was created with [community input](#). While no one wants to pay more, community members clearly and loudly said what they really don't want to see is \$5.00 bus fares, deteriorating roads, route cuts and other service cuts. This is exactly what would happen if the County Executive's plan is not passed by the County Board.

Supporters of this approach explain the vital role that a well-rounded and fully-funded transportation system plays in the lives of the most vulnerable members of our community:

## **Advocates:**

The Combined Community Services Board, a citizens board charged with overseeing the quality and availability of certain human services in the community, wrote:

“As advocates for individuals with disabilities, mental health and substance abuse issues, we know that increased investment in transit is increased investment in the quality of life of the people we serve... Dedicated funding for transportation is needed to ensure our transit lines don’t have to be reduced, but can instead be built upon...”

Bus riders and transit advocacy groups understand that Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) is facing significant budget challenges and that bold action is needed to ensure its long-term viability.

MetroGO!, a well-established transit advocacy group in Milwaukee, wrote:

“Transit provides crucial support for job growth and economic competitiveness, ensuring workers, shoppers and students arrive at their destination... Now is the critical time to preserve and strengthen our transportation system by... instituting a vehicle registration fee, a dedicated funding source that will provide stable and sustainable revenue.”

The Milwaukee Transit Riders Union accurately stated:

“We believe that the VRF is important as a stable funding source for MCTS, which is one of the only major transit systems in the nation without a dedicated local funding source.”

Even Milwaukee County’s Transit Services Advisory Committee, a committee created to by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to advise the Board on transit policy, has taken an official stance in support of the vehicle registration fee, saying:

“we know full well the importance of a strong, sustainable transit system. We also know only too well the difficulty in which the County has been put in the past years with funding cuts from the State. While a Vehicle Registration Fee (VRF) might not be the ideal solution to help fix this funding crisis, without action by the Legislature and approval by the Governor, it’s the only option available.”

## **Business Community**

Milwaukee’s business leaders recognize the importance of transit and transportation infrastructure to the local economy and workforce.

The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce issued a strongly worded statement highlighting the importance of the vehicle registration fee and to the future growth of our region:

“Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele’s SAVE (Sustainable, Affordable, Visionary, and Efficient) [Transit] Plan shows leadership in addressing the challenges facing Milwaukee County’s transportation and transit infrastructure and makes responsible choices to address those needs. By creating a county user fee for motorists and investing the proceeds generated into needed road repairs and our existing transit system’s capital needs,

the County Executive has shown leadership on the county level. The County Executive's proposal for Milwaukee County shines a spotlight on the need for state leaders to show similar leadership in finding a responsible, sustainable, long-term funding solution for the state's transportation infrastructure needs as well."

The Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce, in advocating of its members, wrote:

"There are nearly 50,000 veterans and 5,300 veteran owned businesses that call Milwaukee home. A strong, robust, sustainable transportation system is vital to the success of Milwaukee's veteran community. Those who have served their country deserve every opportunity to succeed in their post-military life. Many of these veterans depend on public transportation to get to their job. For those veterans who own a business in Milwaukee, transit plays an even more critical role in providing transportation to their employees as well as their customers. The success of Milwaukee's veterans is tied to the strength of our transit system."

John Kissinger, President CEO of GRAEF, a major local employer, wrote that:

"...the vehicle registration fee has the greatest potential for a transformative effect on the employment landscape in Milwaukee County. Without a vehicle registration fee, the likelihood of being able to increase transit access to jobs that are outside of the current system would be slim, while the likelihood of reducing service would be much greater."

The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin, in its unequivocal support of a \$60 vehicle registration fee, rightly noted that:

"A vehicle registration fee is the only option the County can implement on its own that will meet the needs of our transportation system."

### **Independent Fiscal Experts**

Milwaukee County's independently elected Comptroller stated:

"As a result of this analysis, I believe that the County needs this revenue if it is to maintain the County's portion of the local transportation systems including highways, the bus system, and parkways..."

...Thus, even at the \$60 rate, choices between funding either capital needs or operating needs will have to be made. Many more choices will be needed if the VRF rate is reduced to \$30 or \$0, including cuts to all areas of the County. The establishment of a VRF as a new revenue source is a viable solution to funding the transportation needs of Milwaukee County."

[Public Policy Forum](#), an independent research organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of public policy decision-making in southeast Wisconsin, stated:

"... we conclude that the County now must "come up with something big" if it wishes to move toward a permanent solution in 2017..."

...Yes, policymakers can develop another round of short-term fixes that will put off the tough decisions for another year. But in doing so, they will only create a bigger problem for the future.”

Each of the organizations cited represent and speak on behalf of a network of constituencies and interests. People from a wide array of backgrounds and experiences are united in support of investing in transportation. County Executive Chris Abele urges the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to listen to these thoughtful community leaders and give their support to the proposed vehicle registration fee.

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